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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001327

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: ISF HEAD: ONE DAY ELECTION IMPOSSIBLE
FROM SECURITY STANDPOINT

Classified By: Ambassador Michel J. Sison for reason 1.4
(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The Director General of the Internal Security Forces (ISF), Major General Achraf Rifi, has reported to the Lebanese Minister of Interior (MOI) that the ISF would be unable to provide full security throughout all polling places in Lebanon if Spring parliamentary elections were to be held in one day. Calculating that 30,120 ISF troops would be required to provide the required security, Rifi told the Ambassador and Emboffs that the ISF could free at a maximum 12,000 of its 23,500 members to provide security at the polling places. Although recognizing that it may be preferable politically to hold elections in one day, according to Rifi it was an impossibility due to ISF,s limited manpower. Rifi, a Tripoli native, also commented on the recent Tripoli reconciliation agreement and on the ISF,s use of US-funded equipment in that northern city. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In a meeting on September 9, the Director General of the ISF, Major General Rifi, informed the Ambassador and accompanying INL officer and RSO, that he had just delivered a report to the Minister of Interior that concluded that the ISF lacks sufficient manpower to provide the requisite security if the GOL were decided to hold the next parliamentary elections in just one day. (Comment: Traditionally parliamentary elections in Lebanon have been held over four consecutive Sundays. Recent electoral law reform proposals have recommended that all voters vote on one day to avoid having votes cast in week one influence voters who vote during a later week. The Internal Security Forces is responsible for providing physical security of the actual ballot boxes and internal security within the polling location (generally schools). The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) is responsible for providing external security outside the polling site. End comment.)

¶3. (C) The study presented to the MOI by Rifi broke down the number of ISF required to provide the election security by voting district (sufficient police in each polling venue and at the vote count site and two police for each ballot box). The breakdown, according to Rifi, is as follows:

Beirut: 73 polling places; 780 ballot boxes, 1 vote
compilation site - total police required: 2,300;

Mount Lebanon: 543 polling places; 1552 ballot boxes, 4 vote
compilation sites - total police required: 8,574;

North: 488 polling places; 1359 ballot boxes, 6 vote
compilation sites - total police required: 7,658;

Beqaa: 328 polling places; 947 ballot boxes, 5 vote compilation sites - total police required: 5,224;

South: 379 polling places; 1257 ballot boxes, 3 vote compilation sites - total police required: 6,364;

Total Police required to provide election security throughout Lebanon: 30,120.

14. (C) Rifi stressed that the ISF only has 23,500 men in its entirety, and therefore, even if they all were assigned to the election detail, the ISF would not be able to provide the 30,120 required policemen. Rifi noted that police duties do not stop during elections, and that the ISF would have to retain at least 11,500 men on the streets to accomplish their normal policing duties during that election day, such as traffic control and crime prevention. Therefore he calculates that he has 12,000 police, at a maximum, available for election-day security responsibilities. When asked who could fill the gap, Rifi replied the LAF would have to do it, since the number of personnel assigned to the other Lebanese security agencies, such as General and State Security, are very small. (Note: Per reftel, new LAF Commander Kahwagi told us earlier this week that while one-day parliamentary elections would represent an advancement in political efficacy, it would also create a new set of security problems. End note.)

15. (C) Rifi and his Chief of Staff, General Joseph Hajal, who also attended the meeting, assured the Ambassador that the ISF provides training to its police officers manning the polling stations and supervising and escorting the ballot

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boxes. Specific election duty training is provided approximately two weeks before the day of elections. Hajal noted that ISF troops are prepared at least two months in advance in how to deal with heightened tensions associated with the impending election.

Violence in Tripoli

16. (C) The Ambassador's visit followed by one day the signing of the reconciliation agreement between Sunni and Alawite leaders in Tripoli to end recent sectarian fighting in that northern city. Rifi, who hails from Tripoli, called the truce agreement "a big step". When asked if the well-armed parties would be required to turn over their weapons, Rifi characterized that as a political decision. "The government cannot ask just the North to turn over their weapons, if they are not going to ask the entire country to do so", he said. Rifi mentioned that the ISF Mobile Forces were deployed to their maximum capability in Tripoli during and before the truce agreement signing, and will remain there until the political situation stabilizes.

17. (C) Rifi confirmed that the equipment and vehicles provided by the U.S. to the ISF under INL programs were used throughout the ISF deployment to the North, as well as used to protect the dignitaries and dignatories during their time in Tripoli. Rifi also commended the Embassy's INL and PD offices and Lebanon Police Program for organizing the very successful press roundtable the day before. The open roundtable discussion of the U.S. Lebanon Police Training and Visitor's Program resulted in very positive press, even from the opposition newspaper Al Akhbar.

18. (C) As the meeting drew to a close, Rifi returned to the issue of not having sufficient men to provide nation-wide voting protection in one day. He was adamant that it was impossible to have a one-day parliamentary election, even while recognizing that it may be a politically preferable procedure. Rifi opined that if Lebanon went ahead with the one day voting plan without the requisite security in place, Hizbollah and its followers would vote, but many other

Lebanese would not, because they would be too afraid to do so.

SISON